CHAPTER 23

ADULT CRITICAL CARE

23.1 INTRODUCTION AND PRINCIPLES OF CRITICAL CARE

INTRODUCTION

Critical care is the discipline that entails specialised medical and nursing care for patients who have, are at risk of, or are recovering from serious, life-threatening injuries and illnesses.

Critical care involves constant, intensive monitoring and comprehensive care including multiple modalities of vital physiologic organ support to sustain life during a period of life-threatening organ system insufficiency. Additionally, it involves intensive resuscitation and appropriate end-of-life care.

Critical care is usually delivered in the intensive care unit (ICU). However, it actually consists of a continuum of care provided throughout the health care chain including the pre-hospital environment, emergency department, hospital ward, high-care wards, and follow-up clinic.

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Effective critical care requires if possible, a multidisciplinary team to deal with these complex patients. In addition to medical and nursing personnel, such multidisciplinary teams must include inter alia physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dieticians, critical care technologists and social workers.